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Mary Blossom Davidson

THE DEAN OF WOMEN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS

An Interview Conducted by

Harriet Nathan

Berkeley  
1967





MARY BLOSSOM DAVIDSON  
Dean of Women 1942 to 1951  
University of California

Portrait in Davidson Hall  
Unveiled March 15, 1962  
Artist, Arthur Palmer





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## INTRODUCTION

In 1911, when Mary Blossom Davidson '06 hesitantly applied for her initial campus job, she approached the office of Lucy Sprague [Mitchell], the University's first Dean of Women. Dean Sprague's duties included supervising the 500 freshman women; that year she also volunteered the use of her lawn so that the cast of the first Parthenia might have a convenient place for rehearsals. It was Lucy Ward Stebbins, Lucy Sprague's Radcliffe schoolmate, assistant, and successor as dean, who hired Mary Davidson. Mrs. Davidson was to follow the office pattern, remaining until 1951 when she retired as Dean Emeritus.

Dean Davidson brought in many staff members including Ruth Norton Donnelly, later Supervisor of Housing Services, and Katherine Towle, who was to become Dean of Women in 1953 and Dean of Students in 1962. Thus, during more than forty years as an undergraduate, employee, and administrator in the University, Mrs. Davidson had observed nearly half of the 100-year span of the University of California at Berkeley, and the period of its greatest growth.



The Alumni Foundation's support of a series of interviews on University History prompted an approach to Dean Davidson, resulting in three interviews: September 1, September 8, and October 3, 1966. She subsequently read and approved the transcriptions. Her sustained interest in students, especially women students, and in particular the provision of suitable housing for women students, helped to develop the theme of housing as a link among several interviews in the current University History series.

Mrs. Davidson and the interviewer shared memories of meetings of campus women's groups in the late thirties and early forties. She was then distinguished by a talent for listening, an approachable quality, and a lively humor that made her presence sought by students. These attributes had outlasted both illness and time, and were still evident in 1966.

She was living in a sunny apartment in the Durant Hotel, a block from campus, after many years in the Women's Faculty Club. Bouquets, potted plants, visitors, and a box of confection-like fruits in paper frills appeared in her apartment during the interviews. Although less vigorous than she appeared in the portrait in Davidson Hall, her demeanor as well as her campus-style knit dress, pearls and earrings were clearly



contemporary. She spoke easily, and was quick to note an occasional gap in memory. At each interview's end, she would smile and say, "We did have fun, didn't we?"

When the conversation turned to Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Mrs. Davidson offered to lend her copy of The Story of Two Lives. It was returned as promised the following week. She then loaned a cherished limited edition copy of Monroe Deutsch's remarks on the occasion of Lucy Ward Stebbins' retirement. When the interviewer hesitated to borrow the second book because of its rarity, Mrs. Davidson observed, "You returned the other one, didn't you?"

The University History series of interviews, in an earlier portion, included persons representing a wide range of University activity--Dean Lucy Sprague [Mitchell], Regent John Francis Neylan, Professor Stephen Pepper, Dr. Langley Porter, Ida Wittschen Sproul, and Dean William Wilson Wurster. The on-going series includes Mrs. Davidson; Allen C. Blaisdell, Director of International House; Robert Underhill, University Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer of the Regents; Brutus Hamilton, Director of Athletics; and Ruth Norton Donnelly.

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Harriet Nathan  
Interviewer

21 April 1967

Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486 The Bancroft Library  
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Berkeley, California



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FAMILY AND CAMPUS LIFE--CLASS OF 1906

Nathan: Can you tell me something about your family, Mrs. Davidson?  
Did you come from this area?

Davidson: Yes, I lived here. My family lived here. We sold our ranch; we had been ranch people, just out of Red Bluff. My father had 35,000 acres there. That's his picture up there [bearded]. One nurse I had here said, "Who's that beatnik you have there?"

I said, "Don't you dare say that he's a beatnik."  
[Laughter] The other picture is my mother, who was a very handsome woman who thought she wasn't handsome and wouldn't have her picture taken. We lived next to Mr. Mowrer, the photographer, and he said, "I'll get her one day." He snuck out that day when my mother had the pick in her hand, at the ranch. She always wore an apron. She was gardening, and he caught her in a still moment and took a picture. The other one is my son Charles and me. I had to hold onto



Davidson: his hand because he was wiggling the way children do. It's pretty cute. That's my family.

Nathan: Did you grow up on the ranch?

Davidson: We grew up in Red Bluff, and then we moved out to the ranch for a while, then we came down here when my father died.

Nathan: Then you've been in this area pretty much ever since.

Davidson: Yes. I came here as a high school girl.

Nathan: Is that your husband's picture over there?

Davidson: My husband's is on the stand. I didn't have a picture of him, but Monroe Deutsch cut that out of a Blue and Gold, and had it framed and gave it to me.

Nathan: So your husband went to the University of California?

Davidson: Yes, and he graduated. When I was in college he wasn't here, but Monroe knew him, and knew me. It was sweet of Monroe to do that, you know.

Nathan: Yes, it really was.

Davidson: Awfully sweet. I treasure that memory very much.

Nathan: What was your husband's graduating class?

Davidson: I was 1906; I think he was 1902.

Nathan: What was his field of work?

Davidson: He was an electrical engineer. He laid cables, that is he superintended the laying of the cables, (I don't think





Davidson: he ever got his hands dirty in his life. [Laughter])  
the cables around the state, and from the east. I don't  
think he went east, I think he superintended it from here.  
They were coming in to California.

Nathan: What kind of cables were they?

Davidson: I think they were light cables. I know he had a great deal  
to do with the lighting of the Hotel Claremont, and arranging  
the lights there. I don't know how he did it. I was a  
stupid little person.

Nathan: I can only doubt that, very much. [Laughter]

Davidson: We were married a short time, and my son was born many  
months after my husband died, and so there aren't very  
clear pictures of my husband in my mind.

Nathan: Of course that was a good long time ago.

Davidson: Yes it was--a long time ago.

Nathan: Shall we go on to your undergraduate days at Berkeley--just a  
little bit about how life on the campus was then.

Davidson: It was very simple. You went to class, saw your friends,  
and went home. There were a few organizations, a few  
national sororities and the YWCA. Prytanean was formed by  
someone named Miss Grant. I'm not sure if I was a charter  
member, but I was an early member anyway. We just drifted



Davidson: along. I didn't have any special interests except the YWCA and contacts with students through the organization.

Nathan: The "Y" was really the major organization then?

Davidson: It really was.

Nathan: What sorts of things did they do?

Davidson: They did everything and anything. They had supper parties; they had sewing and mending parties, where everyone brings her mending and sits around and visits and mends; they had a great many discussion groups. Mary Bentley was the leader of the discussion groups, and she was wonderful.

Nathan: So you met Mary Bentley when you were an undergraduate, before you were involved with the dean's office?

Davidson: Yes, I knew her very well.

Nathan: Would you say that she influenced your views on how to get along with young people?

Davidson: I don't think so. I wasn't conscious of it anyway. I was just myself, just as you see me today. I wasn't any different.

Nathan: Were you a history major?

Davidson: Yes, I was a history major; it just happened to be my interest. I was very interested in Russian history, I don't know why. I think probably because I had a good teacher.

Nathan: Do you remember who the teacher was?

Davidson: He went to San Francisco from here, to the City of Paris



Davidson: store and opened a bar downstairs. He had a beautiful bar, where you bought liquor and took it home. He didn't serve it there. I don't remember his name.

Nathan: I wondered whether there were any of your teachers who remained in your memory.

Davidson: Just that one. I know his name so well; I hope it will come next time. [Refers to outline] I didn't have any special interests. Anything that came along was my interest.



## A JOB IN THE DEAN OF WOMEN'S OFFICE--1911

Nathan: Had you thought of taking teacher-training?

Davidson: I thought I would teach, and I did for a short while. I went to the Belmont School for Boys and taught there, finishing a term for somebody who was ill. I decided that wasn't for me. I don't know what it was, I just didn't like it particularly. I would have stayed if nothing else was offered. Mrs. Cheney, the appointments secretary for teachers at that time, told me about the job in Lucy Sprague's office. I went in, and she sent me to see Lucy Stebbins. One other person, Dorothy Bruce, was asking for the office, and I didn't know anything about it. I went to ask Miss Stebbins about the office. She said there were several applicants and she would let me know. She was very severe, and I was scared. I had to earn a living. My husband had died before my son was born, and I had to support the two of us. I didn't think that she was very gracious to me. She was, she was lovely, but she was very businesslike. She





Davidson: was interviewing an applicant, and I didn't feel I was an applicant at that stage anyway. She chose me. I made the usual mistakes a new person makes in an office, a person who doesn't know anything about business or anything else. She said, "I don't find the names that should be attached to this."

I said, "Oh, I threw it away." I got it out of the wastebasket. That hit me hard. I saw right away what she meant.

Nathan: You were a fast learner.

Davidson: I kept still, anyway.

Nathan: Did you have any specific assignments when you first went there?

Davidson: No.

Nathan: You were to help in the office, basically?

Davidson: I was just to be there. Lucy Stebbins taught also while she was dean, so I had to be in the office while she was teaching.

Nathan: Did you do any teaching when you were in the dean's office?

Davidson: No, I never did.

Nathan: You concentrated on the dean's function.

Davidson: Yes. It was all I could do. I had a little boy who was just a baby, and I owed something to him. I had a little



Davidson: house I kept up. It was on Euclid Avenue. There's a fraternity house there now. It was a little shingled cottage with a nice living room, dining room, kitchen, and three bedrooms upstairs.

Reminiscences of Lucy Stebbins and Lucy Sprague

Nathan: Did you feel called upon to entertain students in your house?

Davidson: No. I never did that very much. We did at Lucy Stebbins' house. She had Thursday or Friday teas, and every week we had a tea. I was supposed to be there; I don't know what happened to the office during those hours. [Laughter]

Nathan: Who came to the teas?

Davidson: The teas were for freshman women, who were invited to come. They came, scared to death, and some boys came with them, also a bit scared. [Laughter] They enjoyed the Stebbinses very much. She went to the door and said, "What can I do for you? Won't you come in?" They came in, looking big-eyed at her. She was charming to them and ordered them some



Davidson: tea and biscuits or whatever we had, fed them, put them in the library in the house, but she didn't get very far with them. She was too nice for them; she was above them.

Nathan: Lucy Stebbins was always a rather intellectual person, wasn't she?

Davidson: Yes, she was. Her father was a very distinguished intellectual man. He was a preacher in San Francisco; they were Unitarians. I think he succeeded Thomas Starr King. It was very close, anyway. Lucy was with the Unitarian Church.

Nathan: In the very early days apparently Miss Stebbins was hoping that there would be more vocational counseling and also more academic counseling for the girls.

Davidson: That was a problem she liked to think of, and work on, and organize so far as she could. She went to the hygiene lectures. We had one a week for the women students. She went regularly, especially when they were considering mothers and babies. She went to that one very conscientiously. I never did go to the hygiene meetings. That wasn't up my alley at all. That was Lucy's.

Nathan: She was interested in the role of women, more or less?

Davidson: She was interested in all students, and I was interested in all students--where they lived, and what they got out



Davidson: of college. We worked pretty well together, and we shared our thoughts with one another. She would say, "Tomorrow morning we'll have a conference." And the next morning we got another date, but we managed to work pretty well together. She was a lovely woman, just a beautiful soul. At the time of her death, she had been ill for some time, at Merritt Hospital. Her lawyer sent invitations to a few friends she wanted to attend her funeral. Katherine Towle and I went together, and we saw Mary Morris sitting there. She was a Negress. She had a beautiful mind and wrote beautiful poetry. She had been devoted to Lucy. There were about fifty people there. I caught Mary's eye and asked her if she would like to come over and sit with us, and she did. At the service they played a song which Mary had written. Lucy had liked it very much, so they played it. Mary cried and cried and cried. She just bawled. This is all off the subject.

Nathan: It tells us something about the personality.

Davidson: It does; it means something.

Nathan: People sometimes become remote in time; you forget how real they were.

Davidson: Lucy was a very broadminded person. She was very interested





Davidson: in all people.

Nathan: Would you say that she was a feminist?

Davidson: No, I don't think so. Her mother was very feminine, however. I remember one night I went to pick her up to go some place, and her mother said, "Lucy my dear, are you going out on the street in that short dress?" And the dress was about an inch and a half from the ground. Mrs. Stebbins was just as cute as she could be.

Nathan: When you say that Lucy Stebbins was interested in all people, are you suggesting that she was interested in people of other countries and other races also?

Davidson: Yes, she was indeed. She was intelligent about them. The fact that Marry Morris was a Negress didn't make any difference to Lucy. She didn't care if she was black or white (she was black as the ace of spades). I'm doing a lot of talking, but it shows what Lucy was like. She was very strict, stood very straight, was tall, lovely to look at. She was warm, tender, just as sweet as she could be. She was a contrast; you wouldn't expect her to be warm when you looked at her. I was a little bit afraid of her at first.

Nathan: It was a little scary when you first went in for a job.

Davidson: When I went in to see Lucy she said, 'Well, you'll have to



Davidson: give me a little time. There are others who want it too."

I said that any time would be all right. The next morning she telephoned to ask me to come over to her house. That scared me to death--to go to her home and meet her mother.

Nathan: She lived at home?

Davidson: Yes. I went, scared and trembling all over.

Nathan: Did you have your hat and gloves on?

Davidson: Yes, I had my gloves all right, and we all wore hats, all the time. Lucy said, "I want you to meet my mother. She's very critical; I'm just warning you. I want to tell you further, I'm going to give you the job." I nearly died. [Laughter] The two things were too much for me.

My salary was \$75 a month. As I went on, I asked for \$80 a month, but Lucy couldn't get it for me. It wasn't in the budget.

Nathan: You had to maintain a household and support your little boy and yourself, and buy those hats.

Davidson: Yes. [Laughter] I really loved hats.

Nathan: When did you get rid of your hats?

Davidson: When I left the Women's Faculty Club, I think I burned them all up.



Nathan: That's very contemporary of you. People don't seem to wear hats anymore.

Davidson: Mrs. Morris, the wife of the manager, said, "You'll have to go to another tea pretty soon," as she was leaving the dining room.

I said, "Don't hurry me, Anna, I haven't got a hat."

She said, "No one wears hats."

Nathan: Was this just recently?

Davidson: Yes, just the other night. I said, "Well, I do."

Nathan: Her book stated that when Lucy Sprague was Dean of Women she and Jessica Peixotto never went to a faculty meeting because women were rather looked askance at.

Davidson: Oh, they were!

Nathan: How did you manage this? Did you go to faculty meetings?

Davidson: No. I was never invited to one. Miss Stebbins went because she was on the faculty. I think Lucy Sprague was not on the faculty.

Nathan: She taught some courses--versification in one case. Whether this would make her a faculty member I don't know.

Davidson: Maybe. Lucy Sprague married a faculty man, Wesley Mitchell. I don't know if she was a member of the faculty or not. It didn't make any difference to me then; it didn't enter into my mind. I just went along.



Nathan: What are your recollections of the first Dean of Women?

Davidson: My recollection of Lucy Sprague is that she was a charming, lovely person, very capable, knew what she was doing, good head and brain.

Nathan: In her book she says how little she knew and how ill-prepared she was to be a Dean of Women. But your view isn't quite the same.

Davidson: [Laughter] That's good. I like differences.

Then Lucy Stebbins took over as Dean of Women and I was assistant to the Dean of Women. I worked up from assistant to dean; I went through all the steps.

Nathan: What was your first title?

Davidson: Assistant to the Dean of Women. There were just the two of us in the office.

Nathan: By 1951, when you were ready to retire, how many were there in the dean's office?

Davidson: Oh my goodness. There was Ruth, Catharine, Katherine Towle, Mabel Lee. They were the chief assistants; under them came dozens of office people. My responsibilities expanded, and as they expanded they were fun.





Working with the Students

Nathan: What was your most interesting assignment in the dean's office? What did you like to do best?

Davidson: Just be there and see the girls. They would come in with all sorts of things. These flowers came from one that I gave money to, \$25 to get her into school.

Nathan: These yellow daisies are from a woman you had helped?

Davidson: The other day she came in with \$25, which she wanted to return to me. She and her son came in, and she said, "This is for you."

I said, "I don't want it. That's yours. That started you off on your life's career."

She said, "Well, it did," with tears in her eyes. She was just darling that way. She recognized her debt, if it was a debt. It was a pleasure on my part. She is a lovely person. She had something wrong with her teeth, and they should have been tended to long ago. But evidently she didn't have the money then. I don't know where she lived.

Nathan: She found her way to the University and to you.

Davidson: And she is back here now, with her son, a tall, strapping boy



Nathan: Do many girls come back to see you?

Davidson: Now they do occasionally. They don't know where I am.

They think I'm up at the Women's Faculty Club. I get my mail there sometimes. I lived there for thirty years.

They remember me. I had a note this year from a girl who was coming to commencement and wondered if she could see me. She, her husband, and her son were coming. Her son was fifteen years old. She was married when she graduated fifteen years before. She remembered me and wanted to see me. That flattered me. I was so pleased.

Nathan: Besides helping students with financial problems, you did some work on approving housing, didn't you?

Davidson: Yes, we took over the housing from Mary Bentley.

Nathan: Did you do any supervising of student activities? Did you do any advising for Prytanean?

Davidson: Oh yes, we all did that. I did a good deal of it. They would come to me with their student problems from Prytanean, and we would discuss them.

Nathan: What sorts of problems did the student groups have?

Davidson: It was mostly housing and things that pertain to students' grades.

Nathan: Did you ever have scholarship problems?



Davidson: Not very often. If a girl wasn't doing well, we would receive a notice about it and call her in.

Nathan: Would you try to see every girl who was having difficulty?

Davidson: There weren't very many girls with difficulties they couldn't solve themselves.

Nathan: Lucy Sprague wrote that there were about 2,000 girls on campus at that time.

Davidson: There were two or three thousand, and out of that you wouldn't have too many who would come into your office for help.

Nathan: Did you have the feeling when you walked around campus that you knew most of the girls? Did they look familiar to you?

Davidson: Yes, usually. I remember one day when Lucy Stebbins and I were coming out of California Hall, and just ahead of us were two girls in trousers, the first I'd ever seen and the first, I'm sure, Lucy had ever seen. I said, "Do you see what I see?"

She said, "Yes, my dear, I see it, and I'm not going to do anything about it. [Laughter] Those things are very precious.

Nathan: Did you also have the feeling that you were not called upon to act on every little thing?

Davidson: Oh, yes, indeed I did. If there was something that puzzled



Davidson: me, I would go to Miss Stebbins about it. If I couldn't handle it myself, I would take it to her or have the student take it to her. But ordinarily I could take care of anything.

Nathan: Did the girls have many money problems?

Davidson: No, they didn't have very many in the early days.

Nathan: When you became Dean of Women, was that in 1942, after the Depression?

Davidson: I was dean during the Depression period, I know. My salary was reduced; I remember that very well. The girls would come to me for very small amounts of money help to tide them over until the next month.

Nathan: Were you able to help them with jobs or funds?

Davidson: Yes, we were. The dean's fund is an interesting small fund. I don't know how large it is now, or even if it exists. One day a student came into the office with a little black purse, and she said, "I found this outside where the students wait to see a dean."

I said, "Is it yours?"

She said, "No, I haven't opened it. I don't know what's in it or anything about it. I'm just handing it to you."

I said, "Let's open it together." So we opened it,





Davidson: and there was a dollar and a half in it. I took it in to Miss Stebbins.

She said, "We'll put it back here, and when we get some more money we'll add it to that." That was the start of the dean's fund, and we've helped loads of students with the dean's fund.

Nathan: How did you add to the fund?

Davidson: People got news of the fund and would bring a contribution of five dollars or two dollars or anything they had, and it just grew. The president asked for a piece of the fund to put in his office, to see if it would grow for him.

Miss Stebbins gave the purse to Georgiana Stephens to put in the file, and Georgiana put it way back someplace in the file, and she didn't remember where she put it. She said, "It's in the file." [Laughter] That was very helpful; we had to find it.

Nathan: Did Georgiana Stephens learn to file better?

Davidson: She's a wonderful person now. She writes beautiful books. She goes to New York and the Far East all the time on trips for her books--books of distinguished qualities.

Nathan: So the people who have helped out in the dean's office often go on to other things?



Davidson: Yes, they do, and do distinguished work.

Nathan: When you were in the dean's office, did the girls come in to you freely?

Davidson: Yes, they usually came to me first. I was in an outer office, and Miss Stebbins had the inner office. They would come and see me before going in to see the dean. Later on we added another office, and I was promoted to that one. The outer office had the stenographer and a helper in it after the addition. We had a Clymer, lots of Clymers: Bertha, Marnie, and Edith. They were all in college, and they all hovered around the dean's office. Their last name was Clymer.

Nathan: How did you recruit these young people to work in the dean's office?

Davidson: We sort of knew them. The University was small then. Through Prytanean and Mortar Board and different organizations, we went to everything. We would get acquainted; we'd know them.

Nathan: Did you try to go to all, or at least some, meetings of the women's organizations?

Davidson: Yes, I went to every one. I remember going into California Hall one day just as the president of the University was coming out. He had been there an hour. I was going in at



Davidson: nine o'clock when my appointment was, and had been there since eight. I told him afterwards that I was embarrassed to meet him coming out of the building when I was just going in. He said, "You take the night work, Bobby, I'm through for the day." [Laughter]

We went every night. Charles would say to me, "What meeting is on tonight?"

Nathan: You worked both day and night, then?

Davidson: Yes, I did. We went all the time. Of course it was my life and job, and that was the way we did it.

Nathan: You were able to keep this up for about 40 years, weren't you?

Davidson: Yes, a long time.

Nathan: It seems to have agreed with you.

Davidson: That's why I'm sick now. [Laughter]

Nathan: [(Outline question), reading] I was wondering how you developed your special interests: housing for girls, the early inspections, student activities, and particularly the supervision of women's housing here at the University.

Davidson: I wondered if you wanted to go back as far as Mary Bentley, who was not a member of our staff, but who was a very prominent Y. W. worker. She inspected houses before we



Davidson: did. We took it over from her. She was a lovely person. We got the idea of inspection from her. We got a good deal from her, and we went on and improved it and made changes, and Ruth Donnelly did that.

Nathan: This was housing primarily for women?

Davidson: Yes, this was entirely for women. Mary Bentley inspected the houses where every woman student lived.

Nathan: Was this when you first went to work in the dean's office?

Davidson: Yes, my first contact in the office.

Nathan: So you got in a horse and buggy. . .

Davidson: That was after that. Mary never went in a horse and buggy that I knew of.

Nathan: That was your improvement.

Davidson: Yes. It was lots of fun. Marjorie Carleton, who is not living now, and my son and I got in a little buggy with a horse that had no shoes on it. I lived up on the hill.

We had an ideal we had to meet in matters of sanitation and fire protection, but the whole thing was up to the householder. We would talk with her, and we learned that she would telephone around, saying, "The inspector is out. Better look out." And they would clean up the houses. Most of them were pretty good, but there were too few.





Davidson: There weren't enough for the girls to use. Sometimes the householder would resent their using them socially, for meetings or anything of that sort. They wouldn't object often, but sometimes they would.

Nathan: Were there places on campus where the girls could hold meetings and give parties?

Davidson: No, not until they had Stephens Union, which came in during Lucy's reign.

Nathan: Is "Lucy's reign" your own little term?

Davidson: That is just mine. [Laughter]

Nathan: The Daily Cal had quoted you to some effect about the sorority system on the campus. Was that part of your function?

Davidson: Yes, we met quite frequently with sororities. I don't remember where we met. I remember meeting in my home, but it was a little too small. As the number of sororities increased, my home had not increased. My son's friends would come, and I thought it was right that they should come, so the sororities had to go.

Nathan: After all, it was a private home.

Davidson: Yes, it was my home. It was his home primarily. I think we then met at Senior Women's Hall.

Nathan: Mortar Board and Prytanean also later met at Senior Women's Hall.



Davidson: The matter came up at a very opportune moment. Patty Chickering was not in the dean's office at all. She was just interested in a Senior Women's Hall, where they were to have their parties, and where they could invite the men. It was a different campus then than it is now. She was one of the nicest persons that ever lived. She's very deaf. She lives way down in the southwest.

Nathan: Was she an undergraduate when she was so interested in the hall?

Davidson: I don't know whether she was or not. Her sister Emily was a beautiful, beautiful girl, charming manners, but everyone knew and loved Patty. Patty just toddled along by herself, but she was just the salt of the earth. Everyone loved Patty. Everyone who knew Emily loved her, but people were very shy of her. She didn't have so many friends as Patty.

Nathan: I came across some references to some of your activities; you can tell me if there is something you want to discuss. You were quoted as giving some views on the independence of women in relation to political activities just before one of the presidential elections.

Davidson: I was? [Incredulously]



Nathan: Some students from the Daily Californian came to interview you.

Davidson: I don't remember that at all.

Nathan: You gave a very ringing statement about the capacities of women.

Davidson: They are just as good as men, politically.

Nathan: In that book you very kindly loaned me, Miss Sprague tells how there was a movement for sex education on campus, almost exclusively negative, with emphasis on diseases. This was her assignment. Practically never having heard of any of it before, she was obliged to explain it to the students. Later, during your tenure, there was another move toward asking for more education about family life. Do you recall this?

Davidson: We did have large classes under Dr. Cunningham, who lectured on any subject the students were interested in. When she was going to lecture on sex, or anything of that sort, she would invite the Dean of Women to come and to criticize.

Nathan: Did you do this?

Davidson: No, Lucy Stebbins did that. She trusted no other.

Nathan: I remember some courses given by Dr. Noel Keyes.

Davidson: Yes, he was in education. I don't remember what he did with women.



Nathan: I think they were big lectures in Wheeler Auditorium, a series of them.

When you were first on campus as an undergraduate, I understand that mostly teacher-training was the field for women. By the time that you left, there had been a very great change in the kinds of things that women were studying. Did this reflect itself in the work of the dean's office?

Davidson: It just reflected a change in the University, I think.

Nathan: Did the expansion of women's interests make more problems for the girls?

Davidson: Just as you see, all this Telegraph Avenue business has its influence on some students who never would have known or thought about it. It has its influence on them, and I don't approve of that at all. It isn't my way of living or my way of thinking, and I'm very glad my son is in Boston. He's a doctor and is established.

Nathan: Maybe this is a hard time to be growing up, for all of them.

Davidson: I think it is, awfully hard. Lots of these girls wear their hair all greasy and long. I saw one before I was ill standing on a corner, wheeling her baby, and kissing her Negro husband good-by. She was white and he was black. That is all right if they want it; I'm not criticizing that, but it bothered me.





Nathan: The times change in a rather shattering way.

Davidson: We have to swing back some way.

Nathan: You have seen a very great change.

Davidson: I have, and I don't like it.



## DEAN OF WOMEN--1942

Nathan: From the beginning, when you were just there in the dean's office until you were the dean and taking all the responsibilities of the office, did you feel that the responsibilities of the office itself changed?

Davidson: I felt that it did change. My simple way of doing things wasn't always the right way. I think I told you about the dedication of Stern Hall, our beautiful dormitory. I was supposed to give the reception, and I got all the girls, who were delighted to come and work. All was going very well until Agnes Robb, President Sproul's secretary, came into my office and said, "The president doesn't like the way you're running the tea."

I said, "Well, what's the matter with it?"

She said, "He thinks it is wrong for a member of the faculty to present the hall to the University."

Nathan: What member of the faculty was going to do it?



Davidson: Monroe Deutsch. He was a great friend of Mrs. Stern's, a lovely man, and the vice-president of the University. He was to present it to the president. I didn't like it. I telephoned Mrs. Stern and told her that I thought that wasn't quite appropriate. She said, "Well, there's nothing you can do about it, Mrs. Davidson." She was a lovely person. I have a card here from her now, which I just love. She said, "I have asked Mr. Deutsch if he would do that, and he has accepted." So it was all over as far as I was concerned, but the president didn't like it. I was to tell the president never to ask me to manage another tea.

Nathan: And you never had to?

Davidson: I never would.

Nathan: It's very hard to have to cultivate the preferences of individual people like this, isn't it?

Davidson: Yes. I wasn't big enough to do it. I had not had any experience. I knew what a tea was, what it should be like. I told Mrs. Stern on the telephone that if her son or daughter would prefer to present the hall to the University and relieve her of the responsibility, we would be very happy to accept it. She said she would think it over. Then she telephoned me and said Mr. Deutsch had accepted. I didn't



Davidson: know what to say.

Nathan: What could anyone say?

Davidson: I don't know. The president didn't think of anything. [Laughter]

Nathan: You had a women's dormitory named after you, didn't you?

Davidson: Yes, I had. My portrait is hanging in it.

Nathan: Who did the picture of you?

Davidson: Mr. Palmer of San Francisco. I think his name is <sup>Arthur</sup>~~Walter~~.

He was the promptest man I ever knew in my life. Mrs. Stephens brought Mr. Palmer over to have lunch with me to see if he could do the portrait, and he said, "Now I'd like to see you pose."

I said, "All right, come on upstairs." I began bringing out evening dresses.

He said, "Oh, no, no." [Laughter] I had never seen a portrait with just a plain dress. I brought out all of the dresses I had, and he said, "What's the matter with the one you have on?" So he took that one.

Nathan: He thought it was really you?

Davidson: He thought it suited me.

Nathan: That makes sense.

Davidson: Yes, I think it's a little dark, but it makes sense.

Nathan: How did it feel to sit for your portrait?





Davidson: Oh, I just hated it. I sat in this chair, and I had to have my hands so and my fingers so, and I couldn't move. He would say, "Would you like to move a little bit?"

I'd say, "Yes, indeed." Then I'd get up and move around the room.

Nathan: You haven't had very much experience sitting quietly, have you?

Davidson: No, it never had happened before and never since. But that seemed to be the thing to do, and I was willing to have it done. One of the boys in the halls asked me, "Is that your picture I see up there in the hall?"

I said, "Well, it is a picture of me once."

Nathan: There is something very appropriate about it, with your long interest in housing, that is particularly nice.

Davidson: Yes, I thought it was very nice. The girls were darling, and all my classmates were there [at the unveiling].

Nathan: The class of 1906?

Davidson: Yes, they all came, and lots of the faculty came. I had so many letters too. I got one from Bill Norton and one from Monroe Deutsch. Norton was a business manager. He just died; he was a sweet man.

Nathan: Did you have a lot to do with him?

Davidson: Just as you would with any business manager. He was on lots of committees that I was on also. That was a part



Davidson: I didn't like--the committee work.

Nathan: What sorts of committees did you have to serve on?

Davidson: Anything. If they had a vacancy, they put me in it.

Nathan: You were always good at being there, weren't you?

Davidson: It was harder than my office. I had to be there.

Nathan: Do you remember any of the committees in particular?

Davidson: I was on the scholarship committee, which I always enjoyed very much. The students who had applied for scholarships and didn't get them were a sore spot in my life. I liked to see them all happy. Often they would come to see me afterwards and ask for help--just encouragement more than anything else. I liked that part of the work very much.

Robert Gordon Sproul I saw very little of really, although I knew him very well as controller in the University. When he became president I was afraid of him. [Laughter] He can bark awfully hard, you know.

Nathan: Yes, as an undergraduate I remember that. I didn't know he barked at administration people.

Davidson: I can bark back pretty well too. I learned that.

Nathan: Did you have occasion to work with Monroe Deutsch much?

Davidson: No, but I knew him very well. He had his office in the same building, and we would just go back and forth informally.



Davidson: Monroe Deutsch was one of the sweetest men in the world. He was very scholarly. He taught first in Berkeley High School and then came to the University before I arrived. He was a brilliant man. I have a little book which he wrote before a dinner we gave for Lucy Stebbins when she retired. It's a limited edition. It was given to me by Constance Steel. Did you ever know of Constance Steel? She was buried, figuratively speaking, down in the registrar's office. She knows more about this University than anybody. She is a wonderful person. She's retired, and she and her sister live down in Carmel now. Her sister is Mrs. Little of Mills College.

[A caller, Mrs. Thornberg, concluded her visit.]

Nathan: I'm sorry your visitor had to leave. Was she a Cal student?

Davidson: Mrs. Thornberg was in Prytanean and perhaps Mortar Board. She was president of the Women Students when it was divided, a very interesting person. She and her husband, who was an "oil man," went over to the Suez Canal. They sent for him to come and straighten out their oil refineries and shipment. He did such fine work for them that the president, or some other high official, presented him with an island. They built their house there and lived there a long time.



Davidson: When they came back here, he was our first Regents lecturer.

Nathan: Is she an old friend of yours?

Davidson: Yes, she is a very old friend of mine. I knew her all the time she was in college. He was very distinguished and she was a very good helpmate. He is no longer living, and she lives in San Francisco.

Nathan: Would you like to talk a little about the war years on campus? We touched on the Depression years, when your salary was cut. You took over full responsibility in the Dean of Women's office beginning in 1942. Do you remember the changes in the girls' responsibilities?

Davidson: The girls had their organizations before, but they took over responsibilities for the girls on the campus. Leila Berry Thornberg was president of the Women Students. Her name then was Leila Berry.

Nathan: Did you get to know her then when she was president?

Davidson: I knew her all the time, and you knew people well, you did not just know their names and classes, you knew the person.

Nathan: How did you get to know them?

Davidson: They would come into the office. The officers had a weekly appointment in the office to talk over anything they wanted





Davidson: to. They could come in any time they wanted to. It was the Office of the Dean of Women.

Nathan: Could they bring up any topic of interest?

Davidson: They could talk about anything that was bothering them or anything that was of interest to the women students. I knew Leila not so much through the office as I did through the organizations.

Nathan: Then the organizations were your primary contact. Were there any other outstanding young women who came to see you?

Davidson: Emily Huntington had to register in the University and came to us to get her living accommodations. She came in with her friend Ruth Turner. They came in together, and at that time my list of places to put the girls was getting very short. I asked Miss Stebbins if she had a place for these girls, and she did not have one. I said, "Is it all right to put them together?"

She said, "Oh, yes. Do." So I put them together, and it turned out that they were close friends.

Nathan: They were both very outstanding women, were they not?

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: Your office then really was the housing office in addition



Nathan: to being the dean's office.

Davidson: Yes, we did not have any Mrs. Donnelly then. The housing office did not come into being until I became dean. I thought Ruth would be a good person and I would like to have her. She was delighted. I wrote her a letter explaining that it was only a very simple appointment I could give her, but she would have the housing of the women students to do. She gradually shed all the other things and became the housing supervisor.

Nathan: Does the housing office now deal with men's housing?

Davidson: Her title is Housing Supervisor. She houses men, women, faculty, anyone connected with the University. They go to her for housing.

Nathan: It was under your term of office that this big development came about.

Davidson: Yes, and it grew so large that we had to move her out. We put her in a little tin house that they erected on the end of Hearst Field, and that was the housing office. It grew and bulged until it had to have a whole house to house them. I understand that they are going to be down here, south of the campus--that the University has purchased an old house.

Nathan: Were there any other functions of your office that grew



Nathan: out of hand in the same way? Did that happen to scholarships?

Davidson: Miss Stebbins was a member and I was a member of the scholarship committee. When she retired I was the only person in the office who was on the committee. I think Mrs. Donnelly is on the committee now.

Nathan: Is there always a representative from the Dean of Women?

Davidson: There is one from the Dean of Women and one from the Dean of Students. Mr. Voorhies was a member for a while, as was Mr. Stone, who never came. He was a very busy man, and there were other things to do.

Nathan: Was the counseling center a development of what had been a part of your offices?

Davidson: I don't think you would call us a center for counseling. What does the center do now?

Nathan: It is partly a vocational counseling center. People can take aptitude tests.

Davidson: We never did that in our office and I don't think they do it now. We did not have any machinery for that and didn't want any.

Nathan: Did you have much contact with people on publications, the students who were involved in publications?



Davidson: I had no contact with them unless they wanted advice or help in some way. Once in a while we would bring them in and scold them. [Laughter]

Nathan: What did you have to scold them about?

Davidson: They would write some silly thing in the Daily Californian that did not seem to me dignified.

Nathan: So you kept them on their dignity a little bit?

Davidson: I tried to. [Laughter] Dan Norton was the editor of the Daily Californian at that time, and he was a rip-snorting boy. He was Ruth Donnelly's brother and a very brilliant man. He died very young, but he wrote things that were published. He sent me a copy of one.

Nathan: Did you have occasion to call him in?

Davidson: Once in a while.

Nathan: You called the men in too when they were undignified?

Davidson: Yes, it didn't make any difference to me whether they were men or women.

Nathan: Someone quoted you as saying that you liked to let the students solve their own problems. How did you go about this?

Davidson: I did not go about it. It just came that way. I believe in that, that you face what your problem is and see what you can get out of it. If they had some problem, I would





Davidson: talk it over with them, and then we would try to come to a solution. It was not cut and dried. None of it was.

Nathan: Each problem was a individual one?

Davidson: Yes, absolutely, and that was the way the whole office was.

Nathan: You were not a bureaucracy at all, were you?

Davidson: I don't know. I had lots of friends in the office, and I had lots of friends outside of the University. They all mixed in together. We were just one big family in this way, although I don't know whether that is a good term or not.

Nathan: You did not feel any great division between campus people and off-campus people?

Davidson: No.

Nathan: Did you try deliberately to mix people at your home, bringing them together?

Davidson: Occasionally groups would meet at my home just as they would meet any place. Usually Prytanean, which was larger than Mortar Board or any other organization we had, would meet at a sorority house.

Nathan: Do you remember the Parthenia, the pageant?

Davidson: I had forgotten about the dear old Parthenia.

Nathan: Lucy Sprague Mitchell said something about it. Did it



Nathan: continue while you were dean?

Davidson: Yes, it did, for a long time. I don't know when it died, but it just died. It was a lovely, beautiful thing.

We had Mary Patterson on the art staff, and she was an artist herself. She went into great detail on the clothes and hair to fit into the character. She was a wonder.

Evelyn Steel Little wrote the first Parthenia, I think.

She is living in Carmel. She and Constance, her sister, know everything about the University. They could tell you all about everything.

Nathan: Did you, as Dean of Women, have particular responsibilities for the Parthenia?

Davidson: Yes, I think we did. I can't remember any particular job we had. Miss Stebbins and I would go to the rehearsals, not all of them, but we would go to make sure that they were proper. [Laughter] Mary Patterson would be there, so we knew all was well. We had in her a person that we could depend upon. They were artists and did a beautiful job. Evelyn Little's Parthenia was the first one we had. She wrote it. All of the actors were students.

Nathan: Could you tell me about changes in the organization of the dean's office, the responsibility of the Dean of Women had and the responsibility the Dean of Men had?



Davidson: We worked together, and he had the same responsibility to the men that we had to the women. I can't remember anything that was very different.

Nathan: From time to time the Dean of Men seemed to call on athletic coaches to come in and work in his office. Did you call on woman athletes to work with you?

Davidson: No. We had Margaret Beattie for a while, who was head of laboratory sciences in the School of Public Health. She had her office in the Life Sciences Building. She graduated with a Ph.D., and she worked in our office just to help us out. We paid her slightly, but it was not an adequate amount at all. She is still alive, and she is a fine person, giving all her time to the Red Cross and the city YWCA.

Nathan: You spoke of old students coming back to visit you, sometimes with families.

Davidson: They frequently do that. I hear from them at Christmas time, and I'm very rich with Christmas cards from these girls who have sons or daughters in college now. That is a great satisfaction and pleasure to me. There is one in New York, and there is one in Los Angeles. They are scattered all over.

Nathan: Did you have much to do with women foreign students?



Davidson: No, not especially. They came in like any of the others.

Nathan: The Foreign Student Advisors now take care of anything related to foreign students.

Davidson: Yes, they do, and they outgrew us.

Nathan: Perhaps you cultivated housing and foreign student advising so that they could grow. You said that you did not do a great deal of guidance, but you received an award for guidance in 1951 from the National Association of Deans of Women.

Davidson: Dear me, did I get that? That sounds like information out of the Blue and Gold. I don't know what that was.

Nathan: They seemed to think you were very good at guidance.

Davidson: Yes, they did. They called upon me several times for advice.

Nathan: What sorts of problems would they consult you on?

Davidson: We had fights. For instance, we had Dean Allan, who was at Stanford, and she and I did not get along very well because she did not do as I did and I did not do as she did. Our approaches were different. She had to set the rules, and she had to do it that way. I did not have any rules at all. We were just different people.

Nathan: Would the Dean of Women's Association turn to you about problems among the deans or problems with students? What kinds





Nathan: of problems were you dealing with?

Davidson: I think it must have been just students because I was interested in students. They were students, they were not anything else. They were girl students.

Nathan: They were not numbers.

Davidson: No, not a bit. Some of them I knew very well, just as I knew Leila. Some of them I did not know so well, but I would still hear from them. I'd help them in some way. I think I showed you the bouquet I had from the girl with the \$25. Those things were very near to me.

Nathan: In a way it certainly proves that your system was a good one even if it was no system at all.

Davidson: Yes, I think it was myself. I have a very fine son who would be a credit to anyone, and I did the same with him. I have the same attitude with him.

Nathan: It would be harder to do as you did, responding to each thing, than to have rules.

Davidson: I think it was.

Nathan: How could you run a whole office that way?

Davidson: It's a little difficult to say. Sometimes there were a few people waiting to see me and sometimes there was no one there at all.



Nathan: Did you try to limit the appointments?

Davidson: No. We did on special subjects like scholarships, that is we tried to, but we didn't succeed very well. If a girl got started on something, we let her finish it.

Nathan: So it was a personal approach all the way. When you were sitting on the scholarship committees, what qualities did you look for in a student?

Davidson: We looked for scholarship, of course. You had to have a "B" average to get a scholarship. We looked for attitude toward the University. We looked for her participation in student life. I think those were the important things we looked for. We looked for the girl herself. It is a wonderful way to get to know a person. She would come in scared to death. She was going to see someone about a scholarship that she felt she had to have. In a few minutes she was laughing and chatting about anything. That is where you get your point of view of the student.

Nathan: No one could stay scared of you very long. Did it take you usually about three minutes to get to know someone?

Davidson: Usually it took about three, then we would have a good time. I remember one girl who had a scholarship, and she wrote an article in the Daily Californian against the University.



Nathan: Critical of the University?

Davidson: Yes, so I called her in and asked her if she wrote the article, and she said she did. I said, "Did you mean what you said about the University? You do hold a University scholarship and you owe the University credit for something."

She turned the other way and said she had not thought of it. The problem was not a very deep one, I do not remember what it was, but she had a feeling about it, and she told it to me. I told her that I thought it would have been better if she put two sides to it, and she agreed.

There was that sort of give and take, and it didn't amount to anything, but it did. I saw her not long ago, and she said, "I've thought of you many times and that scholarship and how mad I was at the University."

I said, "Why didn't you let us know you were mad at the University instead of saying unkind things about the University?"

She said, "I should have done that." It's those little things that came up that I think makes a woman.

Nathan: Did you find that the students were able to come to you with their criticisms and problems?

Davidson: Yes, I think they did. Some of them would not, but I don't



Davidson: think that was wholesale at all. After they had come they could shed them, but it was a little hard to think of going to a dean with your problem. After you got in there and talked with her, no matter who the dean was, you would find sympathy and that she had had experience that could help you.

Nathan: You certainly had a human quality in all of your dealings with students.

Davidson: You couldn't do it any other way, and I would still do it that way.

Nathan: I can see why you received an award for guidance. There was a dedication of the 1951 Blue and Gold to you with a picture of you in an elegant black suit, with a big brass bowl also in the picture. Was it a surprise to you that the Blue and Gold would be dedicated to you?

Davidson: It was supposed to be a surprise, but the news leaked out.

Nathan: I guess you knew too many students.

Davidson: Yes, I knew one of the girls very well, and she said, "You're coming down to the Blue and Gold appointments dinner, aren't you?"

I said, "Well, I haven't been invited to come to the dinner, but I like Spenger's so much, good food and everything,





Davidson: that I'll just go." She laughed and realized I wasn't so dumb.

Nathan: This was quite an impressive tribute from the students.

Davidson: Yes, it really was, because there had never been a woman head of the Blue and Gold until the war. During the war the women took over and carried on. It was quite nice that I got in it too. I was very pleased. I was about to throw the book away, and my son looked over some of the ones that I was going to give to Davidson Hall. He said, "You're not going to give this away, are you?" So I have the Blue and Gold, and it's too large for any of my shelves, but it's there.

Nathan: Have you given other things to Davidson Hall?

Davidson: I gave them little things. When I moved from the Women's Faculty Club, I gave a lot of books to Davidson Hall. I thought they could throw them away or keep them wherever they wanted. I never heard whether they kept them or not, not a word.

Nathan: Do you feel any special affinity for your namesake building?

Davidson: I do. I'm always interested in it and in meeting the housemother. We have a lovely housemother over there or had one for several years. It was Mrs. Bennett, who is



Davidson: now the housemother in Ida Sproul Hall. They just picked her up and moved her down there. Of course they asked her to go. She was good, and I love her. She is the sort of woman that you like very much.

Nathan: We started tracing your tenure in the dean's office, and we eventually hope to talk to Katherine Towle. Could you tell me a little about her coming to the office?

Davidson: She retired from the Marine Corps as a colonel. She was in the office a little bit before that but just more casually. When she returned from the Marine Corps she came in to the University administration. She was involved in the University Press for a while, and then she went to Dr. Deutsch's office. He was going to retire. I went in and asked him if he had any objections to my approaching Miss Towle for our office. He said, "Oh, no, not at all. Go and get her, quick."

Nathan: You had your eye on her.

Davidson: She was a very good person; I knew it. She came in, and at that time Dean Stone was Dean of Students. He had an idea that all the women should be counselors, not deans at all. I didn't like the idea. I liked Mary Stone, his wife, very much. The reason I can be so frank is that I



Davidson: grew to to like him. At first I didn't like him a bit. He said, "You can all be counselors, and you will be a head counselor."

I said, "We signed our contracts as deans of women. We don't want to lower the status of deans of women. The University has a Dean of Women, and I think it would be too bad to change it." I did not see any point in changing it; I thought it was wrong.

He said we should all be counselors and just leave it that way. I said, "Well I don't like that a bit, Dean Stone. I think you should make us all deans. We can have deans, associate deans, assistant deans, assistants to the dean, and go down from there." He didn't like that. We were just like this, at cross purposes. He said some things that weren't altogether true about the office and I didn't like it, so I thought the thing to do was to go to the president about it.

He (the president) said, "Ha, ha, ha." He laughed.

I said, "It isn't any laughing matter. We've signed our contracts with the Regents now. They are signed by the Regents, and we are to go for another year this way. During that year we'll see what comes out."



Davidson: He said, "Well, that sounds sensible, although it makes no difference whether you're a counselor or a dean."

I said, "It does to a student."

He said, "Maybe it does." Nothing more was said.

We kept our titles and went on from there.

Nathan: Was this the occasion when you closed the office door and everybody sat around and knitted?

Davidson: Yes. [Laughter] That was one of the occasions.

Nathan: Did you do this to get an idea of the feeling within the office?

Davidson: I did want to know. I wanted everyone in the office to have the opportunity to express herself and to make known what she thought about the situation. So I thought a strike was the best thing. There was a sense of humor in it that made it not too binding. We had our strike. Mrs. Quire brought her knitting and we all had a gay time.

Nathan: So you saw no students that day but counseled with each other.

Davidson: Yes. I don't think anything was said after that.

Nathan: The issue simply wasn't raised again, was that how it worked?

Davidson: I can't remember Dean Stone ever mentioning it again.





Nathan: I think you are one of the few people to vanquish Dean Stone. [Laughter]

Davidson: He really was a sweet man in lots of ways. He didn't want to bother with us. We were his counselors, and he would say, "Go see her, go see her."

Nathan: He would have been the only dean under that proposal?

Davidson: He would have been the dean and we would all have been counselors, and I didn't like it.

Nathan: You were not ready for that.

Davidson: I still don't like it. We had a Dean of Women all those years. Why change it? I did not see any point in changing it.

Nathan: Did you always keep your eye out for likely women to come and work in the office? Did you find Ruth Donnelly yourself? Did you know her?

Davidson: I found her myself. I knew her slightly, but quite well in those slight areas. She did a lot of work on the Daily Californian. I knew her as a student. I found that she was not doing anything just then. She was living in Napa with her family. She was married. I wrote to her and said that Edith Clymer was going to leave us, and would Ruth be interested in taking over that part of the work? I said, "It isn't a very important job, but if anything is important, it is the women students." Housing would



Davidson: come under her, I pointed out, along with other things.

She has been wonderful.

Nathan: You kept your eye out, saw Katherine Towle, and got her?

Davidson: I sure did.

Nathan: You were saying that everybody knew all the work of the office. Did you think that you get a more loyal group that way?

Davidson: I think so. That is the only way I know how to arrange it.

Nathan: If you were giving advice on the organization of an office you would suggest that everybody have an idea of everything that goes on?

Davidson: Yes, and I would be sat upon quite firmly by a great many people and I wouldn't care, because I believe in that way of working. The office now is so different from what it was that I might change my mind now, I don't know. Mrs. Neely does everything and has girls under her to assist her. I am completely out of touch with the office.

Nathan: Do you now correspond with any of your old associates?

Davidson: I do occasionally. I'm not much of a letter writer. Just now I don't write any, but I'm very fond of my old friends. It doesn't mean I'm not fond of them, it just means I can't. I keep up the friendships I had, like Leila, who came in today, and various persons who look me up.



Nathan: There seem to be plenty of people who have fond recollections of you.

Davidson: It's very nice of you to say that, and I hope they have I felt as one with them. I can't work any other way.

Nathan: This human touch seems to be something the students look for and don't always find in the big institutions. It was a pretty big institution while you were still on campus, wasn't it?

Davidson: Yes, it was beginning to grow. I like a small institution. I like a large institution and a small one in it. You have to have it large to have something to look forward to and look up to, at least I did. You have to have it small enough that you don't pass by the personal side.

Nathan: Did you bring Mrs. Quire in and Mrs. Neely into the dean's office?

Davidson: Miss Towle brought Mrs. Neely in. Mrs. Quire was Assistant Dean of Women in my office. I brought in Mrs. Quire. Alice Hoyt was under Dean Stebbins and came in with me. Mabel Barbee Lee just came in one day and said, "I just came in to present myself to the Dean of Women. I'm all by myself." We had a good time. We needed someone in the office, so we asked her if she'd like to come. She stayed three or four years and retired when I did.



Davidson: She was a darling person. She has written three or four books since then.





## HOUSING COMMITTEES AND A "SUITABLE" PLACE TO LIVE

Nathan: Perhaps now I'll ask a question or two more, and if these don't interest you we'll let them slip by. You were closely associated with the housing developments and the housing committees on the campus. In fact, I think you were on every one.

Davidson: I think I was. They didn't think anything of housing in those days. The president thought that if a student came to the University, she should find her own place to live, I thought she should find a suitable place to live.

Nathan: So the "own" place and the "suitable" place are not necessarily the same.

Davidson: Not the same at all.

Nathan: I noticed that you were on the very first one, the Committee on Outside Relations, in 1915.

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: You were on that one. Can you cast your mind back to 1915



Nathan: and remember?

Davidson: Not very easily. [Laughter]

Nathan: Well, coming up a little bit later, to 1919, do you recall how the influenza epidemic---

Davidson: Oh, we had lots of fun working with that.

Nathan: It seemed to emphasize the housing problems of the women.

Davidson: We made and sterilized, every day, the masks. The students were to call at Hearst Hall, which was not this Hearst Hall at all, but the shingle building, for their masks. They couldn't wear the same one two days. They'd have to leave the old one, and get the fresh one. We sterilized them, so that they were pure.

Nathan: You outfitted all the students?

Davidson: All women students---

Nathan: Every day.

Davidson: Yes, they had to do it.

Nathan: Were you concerned about the women students who were sort of scattered through the community?

Davidson: Yes, we put the notice in the Californian, hoping they would read it. We couldn't reach them any other way.

Nathan: So the Daily Californian was your means of reaching those students? Did that connect with your worries about the



Nathan: the housing, the suitable housing?

Davidson: Yes, it did. It made a difference. We found lots of students, some of the students living in houses that weren't suitable for them, and we'd suggest a change to a suitable house. Out of that grew the housing program, the housemother---

Nathan: There was a housemothers' association?

Davidson: Yes. And Mother Martin was the chairman of that. She was a darling soul. She would come in to see me and she would talk at length. Often, when she had to run I hadn't uttered a word. She would get up to go and say, "My dear, you have helped me so much." And I had to laugh. She got it out of her system. We had such fun that way. [Aside] I mustn't get too reminscent.

Nathan: That's what you are supposed to do.

Davidson: Mother Martin was a lovely person. When she gave up her house here, she went south, and she lived to be some ninety-odd years old. I don't know when she died.

Nathan: Contact with students seems to keep people in good shape.

Davidson: Oh yes. She was wonderful. They all loved her.

Nathan: She had a boarding house for girls?

Davidson: Yes. She had one of the Brasfield houses. Down here on Durant Avenue they were, and she ran one of them.



Nathan: Also, it seems that as far back as 1911, people were giving money for girls' dormitories.

Davidson: It's always been foremost in the minds of everybody.

Nathan: Who would you say pushed the hardest for dormitories?

Davidson: I think most of the pushing started from our office and went to Prytanean, Mortar Board, and those organizations that give money toward the project. Also Mrs Adolph Graupner was very interested in a dormitory for freshman women.

Nathan: So you really engaged the interest of the women's organizations.

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: By 1920, apparently, Miss Stebbins was hoping that the legislature would be persuaded to give money for the student dormitories. That sounds like a long time ago.

Davidson: Yes, doesn't it. I wonder if they were.

Nathan: I haven't been able to find--

Davidson: Any word about it?

Nathan: No word about it, and there were several starts. President Barrows had an idea in 1923 for building dormitories. Does this recall--

Davidson: It was when he was president for a few years; he had the idea of doing it, and then he resigned the presidency and went back to his teaching, and didn't mention dormitories





Davidson: again.

Nathan: It's curious how it rises as an issue, and then subsides again, and then apparently nothing much happens to that little impulse. There is a receipt for Mrs. Hearst, who gave \$100 to start a dormitory [laughter], and Miss Sprague deposited a couple of thousand dollars in gifts for dormitories.

Davidson: She did. The women's house, Stebbins Hall, is the same house that Mortar Board took in the beginning. They changed it all over. They didn't want approval. They were afraid we would interfere. But we won them over.

Nathan: How did you win them over?

Davidson: Just by talking to them. Asking them questions. They wouldn't abide by any University rules. As I remember it, they would have men come and stay--indefinitely.

Nathan: Oh, really? That's not as modern as it sounds. ✓

Davidson: But they were very afraid our office would try to run it, and I think Miss Stebbins persuaded them that we had no desire to do that. We wanted it suitable for women students, so Mortar Board decided to change it and make it right, and they named it Stebbins Hall for Lucy Stebbins.

Nathan: That's a victory.



Davidson: We tried our best to make them change it. We wanted Lucy Stebbins' name to be on the large dormitory, but they wouldn't give up their name. And I didn't interfere at all in that. They wanted it; that was their decision; they liked to run it, and they did.

Nathan: Was it always a cooperative enterprise?

Davidson: Yes, it was always a cooperative. We had--I shouldn't tell you this--we had a manager of the cooperatives whom I couldn't get along with. He wouldn't see any sense to our rules. They would prepare the food in Oxford Hall. You could go down there to see the trays. They took them around in wagons. The first tray would be on the floor of the kitchen. The next one on top of that, and then go on up, as high as the wagon could take them. And I objected to that. The floor was dirty, and the food was dirty. Naturally it would be, and the bottom of the tray was dirty, and it would rest on top of the food, and that bothered me very much. I couldn't get along with him.

Nathan: Was this in about 1943, when you finally wrote a letter to the coops saying that you were concerned about the cleanliness of the food? Apparently the answer was that other living accommodations were not handling the food very well either,



Nathan: but that the coops would try to improve.

Davidson: Well, I understand that he did improve very much, and I give him credit. It wasn't through me that he did it. I guess he saw the light of day. I don't know. But he was manager there for a long time, and did as he thought best. He didn't know it was dirty. We sent Mr. Voorhies and Cecil Piper down to inspect the food area in Oxford Hall and they found awful conditions--rats, mice, and these things that would hang down in the icebox: amoebas of some sort. [Laughter] They were white, a string of them hanging down. We couldn't stand that: food coming out of that icebox going to the students.

Nathan: Did you also have inspection for fraternities and sororities?

Davidson: We did for sororities, not for fraternities.

Nathan: Not for the fraternities. That seemed to be one of the points of dispute, that you were criticizing the coops, but the fraternities were just as bad.

Davidson: I see. But that was another problem.

Nathan: Yes.

Davidson: We talked to the sororities, as I remember it, and they asked for inspection. They all had housemothers and wanted it right. We would go and inspect the sororities. And in



Davidson: one sorority, I think it was the Kappa house, they had a normal bedroom with a couch bed in it, and beautiful, beautiful little pillows--under the bed. And the bed was tousled around, not made, or poorly made anyway. Things that a girl would never do at home, I'm sure, and we thought that it was bad for her to do them here. And we tried to straighten out the pillows. [Laughter]

Nathan: The pillow problem.

Davidson: Yes. We really went into it whole-heartedly, and I think we did improve conditions a good deal. I wouldn't say they were perfect.

Nathan: And you also went into the girls' boarding houses in the same manner?

Davidson: Oh, yes. Just the same. Then, some of the housemothers were good, and some of them were poor, but most of them were very presentable women.

Nathan: And did they tend to enforce University rules of conduct?

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: Well, let's see. The Committee on Outside Relations then changed to the Committee on Living Accommodations in 1924, and you were on it again.





Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: Or still. Apparently you or Miss Stebbins or both were on just about every session, every year.

Davidson: Yes, we were. Both of us, I think.

Nathan: And did the president appoint you? Is this how it worked?

Davidson: No, I think we appointed ourselves. I don't remember. Do you remember who the chairman was? Dean Putnam?

Nathan: It was Dean Putnam. Right. The committee was Putnam, you, Joel Hildebrand, Miss Stebbins, and Washburn. That was the 1924 list. I hadn't seen all of them, but your name keeps appearing.

Davidson: I think that's about right. I think Dean Putnam appointed the committee; he organized it, and asked us to serve on his committee, and we did.

Nathan: Mhm. So your interest included the diet, and the cleanliness of the food, and the conduct of the students.

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: Then by 1937 there was a Faculty Committee on Housing, and the ASUC established a Housing Bureau. Do you remember George Gordon?

Davidson: I remember the name.

Nathan: He headed the housing bureau, the student housing bureau.



Davidson: I remember him very well. Funny little boy. He afterwards went into the hotel business.

Nathan: Is that what he did? Apparently this was the students' first serious attempt with housing.

Davidson: Yes, I think it was. It was very interesting the way housing grew, from nothing up to something big.

Nathan: Yes, back to this philosophy that students live wherever. . .

Davidson: Yes. That was the philosophy of President Sproul.

Nathan: I wondered whether that had something to do with President Wheeler, who was influenced by the system of the German universities, which are not residential.

Davidson: It probably was. I never did know where it came from. I didn't like it.

Nathan: Let's see, then in 1940, I understand--correct me if this is not right--that President Sproul brought in students onto the housing committee. Now, do you remember their advent?

Davidson: I think there were two students, a man and a woman. I don't remember much more about them. They were very quiet in meetings. They didn't have much to say, but seemed interested.

Nathan: Do you remember why President Sproul brought them in?

Davidson: No, I don't know. I wasn't the chairman, I think, so I don't know.



Nathan: He seemed, or was thought to have felt that he didn't want the students to take over the housing situation, and. . .

Davidson: And also he was a great man to let the students do things that they wanted to do, if they were appropriate. And, he may have thought that they should have representation on the committee.

Nathan: And from your recollection, you found them rather quiet?

Davidson: Yes, that's my recollection.

Nathan: Around this time, and a little later, there was also the question of discrimination in housing, and whether the approved housing list should include any houses that did discriminate. Racial discrimination basically was the problem. What was your feeling?

Davidson: I didn't know that they discriminated. Whom did they discriminate against?

Nathan: From the stories that I have read in the Daily Cal. . . .

Davidson: Negroes? Jewish?

Nathan: And Orientals at that time. There were comparatively few Negroes apparently, but many of Japanese and Chinese descent, and others.

Davidson: I didn't know they discriminated.

Nathan: This was not part of your awareness at the time. The students were beginning to take this very seriously, in the early



Nathan: '40's, but this doesn't particularly stay in your mind as an issue?

Davidson: It doesn't recall itself to me. I would certainly have been concerned about it, I think, if I knew about it.

Nathan: But your particular interests were in the ones we've already mentioned, really, the suitability and the cleanliness. . .

Davidson: Yes.

Nathan: . . .and the conduct of the students.

Davidson: And their mixing up. One house was as good as another. You couldn't say, "I live in Mrs. So-and-so's, because it's better." The housemothers were different, certainly.

Nathan: Are there housemothers now, do you know?

Davidson: Well, I've been very worried about that. There are housemothers in the dormitories around; and I think, I don't know, but it's my impression that Ruth Donnelly's office gives attention to the dormitories, and that the boarding houses for women seem to have disappeared.

Nathan: You feel that most of the boarding houses have gone now?

Davidson: I think they have. I may be awfully mistaken on that. I wouldn't say that they have, because I don't know that they have, but it seemed to me that Ruth's interest was with the dormitories.





Nathan: Had you heard about the young couples serving more or less as housemother and -father in the dormitories?

Davidson: Well, that's new since my day, and I think it's a good idea. But unless both members of the couple are good, I would be hesitant to try it. Ruth's ready to try almost anything.

Nathan: Yes, well of course that was sort of your philosophy, to some extent, wasn't it?

Davidson: Yes, it is, and I back her at it. But I don't know-- I think that's the reason our approved boarding houses have disappeared.

Nathan: The problem of supervision, you feel, was part of it? I met the young man who is housefather at Davidson Hall.

Davidson: Is he there now?

Nathan: He's there now. His name is Jay Folberg. He had done some work in the Institute of Governmental Studies and he. . .

Davidson: Are there men in Davidson Hall?

Nathan: No, I believe Davidson Hall is for girls, as far as I can tell.

Davidson: It was for girls.

Nathan: It still is. There was a little story about Jay in the Daily Cal. He explained that in order to give the girls



Nathan: privacy, when it was necessary for him to emerge, not only does he shout "Man" when he enters a room, but he takes off his glasses. [Laughter] I think he's a delightful fellow. He and his wife are the houseparents.

Davidson: I think I'm to meet them. They're going to come here to dinner some time. I'll go downstairs to dinner to meet them. I haven't met them yet.

Nathan: You do keep a little in touch with Davidson Hall, then.

Davidson: Yes, I like to. I like to go there. I haven't been for some time now, but I love to go there.

Nathan: Let's see. I was really pursuing a little the question of the students on the housing committee. I take it from you that nothing much changed when they came on.

Davidson: The Committee on Living Accommodations.

Nathan: Right.

Davidson: Well, there were the students, and they didn't bother anybody.

Nathan: And they didn't contribute to. . .

Davidson: They talked, but they didn't object to anything we were doing or considering.

Nathan: Do you recall the big emergency in housing in 1943, when, you know, the war had begun here, and there were some navy people in. . .



Davidson: We had women in the Alpha Delt house, and the house on Euclid down from the Alpha Delt house was for women. Ruth Donnelly and Catharine Quire inspected it before we took it. We had an evening meeting, the three of us. Ruth said, "I can go there and scrub the bathtubs."

I said, "No, you can't." I remember I was awfully firm about that. I said, "You are not going to start scrubbing bathtubs." She was awfully interested and wanted to do it. She would do anything to make it right, and I wouldn't let her.

Nathan: How did you get the bathtubs clean?

Davidson: I don't know. I don't know whether women ever went there or not.

Nathan: Do you recall International House?

Davidson: We didn't have anything much to do with International House in the office. What would you like to know about it?

Nathan: I wondered whether it was on the approved list.

Davidson: No, it never was.

Nathan: I don't know that it ever applied to be.

Davidson: I don't think they did.

Nathan: It was a different kind of operation.

Davidson: Yes. And there were house residents there who were older



Davidson: people, and who were responsible for entertainment, and some other things. They lived in the house, and it was thoroughly chaperoned.

Nathan: Well, during this, and after the big housing crisis, were you trying again for dormitories in that period?

Davidson: Yes, we always tried for dormitories. I think it's Ruth's influence that got the dormitories here. I don't know whether she made herself disagreeable on the committee. [Laughter] She would never do that, but she would not drop the subject.

Nathan: It was in 1945, I guess, that the first one, Fernwald, came to be built. Do you remember the building of Fernwald and how it came about?

Davidson: It was up the hill to Fernwald.

Nathan: On the Smyth tract.

Davidson: I remember that very well, and I remember dear, sweet Bill Norton. He would pick up a trunk and deliver it. He worked himself very hard there. The rain was coming down, and it was all mud, it was terrible [when Fernwald was opened]. The trunks were there, too, and they had to be placed in the rooms. Bill would take a trunk and show the men. He trudged like a working man up the steep hill and delivered the trunks.





Nathan: To get the girls in.

Davidson: And settled.

Nathan: He apparently was influential in interesting the Regents in this first enterprise.

Davidson: Yes, he was. I remember once in the east, when I was dean, I went to a deans' meeting. I didn't like it much, but I went. It was run by a group. You know how women are. And I wasn't one of the group. I could see through a good many things they did. One woman asked me how I got along with our business manager. I said, "Get along with him? Why, we get along just fine. It never occurred to me not to."

She said, "We don't get along with our business manager at all."

I answered her, "I don't know how you can live that way." Because Bill was the nicest man in the world to get along with. I was sorting some papers the other day, and I came across a letter from Bill, which he wrote to me early, and one from Monroe Deutsch. They were as sweet as they could be. I just treasured them and kept them. But it isn't always that you find a Dean of Women and a business manager getting along. That is, that's what I



# THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

ROBERT GORDON SPROUL  
President of the University

MONROE EMANUEL DEUTSCH  
Vice-President and Provost of the University

BERKELEY CAMPUS  
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND PROVOST

August 10, 1947.

Dear Bobbie:

I really didn't need a watch to be assured  
of your friendship. But it is beautiful and a constant  
reminder of my good friends on the campus - and high in  
that list stands Bobbie Tridson. The very warmest of  
thanks to you for your part in it; I must tell you that  
the note was one greatly and make me feel the  
dequency of words.

Our friendship goes back so many years and  
I am so sure that I know it will continue  
whether either of us is on the campus or not.

May the years ahead be happy ones for you while  
we still in humor and in the years to come  
we become brother and sister servants!

Affectionate regards from Alice + myself.  
Yours,  
Alice



My dear Bob:-

May I call you Bob?  
 you so nice and have helped  
 me so very much. Come newyears  
 day I just wanted to say thanks  
 so much.

On Jan 1-1947 I will have  
 finished six years as B.M. on the  
 Berkeley Campus. So many fine things  
 are now coming our way I shall need  
 your help more than ever. It is so  
 nice to have a friend like you to  
 help and work with.

May you be pleased with  
 the year 1947.

Bill Norton



Davidson: found at that conference, and I made a mental note of it.

Every conference I went to after that, I found that it was true.

Nathan: Perhaps you knew something the other deans didn't know, which was how to get along with a business manager.

Davidson: We didn't have any arguments. You couldn't help but get along with Mr. Norton. He was as sweet as he could be, and beside that, you go along your way, and if it touches his business, you ask him about it. We didn't have any trouble.

Nathan: So the financial parts of housing were not a problem.

Davidson: No. Not a bit. Except when they built these houses on the hill, the big ones, I was on my vacation up in the mountains. Ruth telephoned me that they were building this house [Fernwald] and that it would be ready for occupancy in October. And it was. It was ready.

Nathan: I think it was only in August or early August that the Regents determined to. . .

Davidson: They must have given permission to build it.

Nathan: That must have gone up very fast. Maybe that's why Mrs. Donnelly mentioned that these were the thirty-day wonders.

Davidson: Yes, that probably is.

Nathan: I can't imagine building a dormitory in 30 days.

Davidson: No, and have it stand there for years after.





Nathan: In the past it seemed from the discussions that the University didn't have room for the dormitories. Yet now there seems to be room. Do you know how this came about?

Davidson: They just bought up the property and moved the houses off. They just sold one off the other day; they wrecked it and moved it.

Nathan: At one time they seemed to feel that the dormitories needed to be on the campus.

Davidson: Yes, they did, but they got over that. There wasn't any place on the campus for them; there was no place for the buildings.

Nathan: One site that had been discussed is the location of the stadium.

Davidson: Beyond the stadium; Bill Wurster designed a very pretty house, but no one would go up there. He is quite feeble now. I wonder if he can sit at the table. But he's still very active in architectural centers, and he's still very interested in the University. His daughter was married recently.

Nathan: So there were other designs for dormitories that were never built, apparently.



Davidson: Who designed our dormitories around here?

Nathan: I think Warnecke did. There was a competition, and his firm won. I understand that the building is slowing down, and no more are contemplated for a while. Perhaps there will be no more dormitories.

Davidson: I think there will be more dormitories always, but they need more party space. If they don't find something to do on Halloween instead of shooting off firecrackers, I'm going to move.

Nathan: Is it getting to be noisy here?

Davidson: It was so noisy that night that I stayed awake all night waiting for the next explosion.

Nathan: It used to be quieter, and you didn't have parking problems to deal with in the old days. Did the girls ride bicycles on campus?

Davidson: No. There were two girls from England here who rode bicycles, but they were the only ones that did. They were very conspicuous, riding around on their bikes. Now everyone rides a bike or a motorcycle, or has a car.

Nathan: Concerning married students quarters, was Albany Village part of your responsibilities?

Davidson: Ruth developed that.



Nathan: It was after her advent in the job.

Davidson: Yes, it was her job, and I didn't know anything about it.

Nathan: Your particular field of interest basically was the individual girls, and then later the individual boys, and their living quarters.



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Harriet Siegel Nathan

Graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1941 with an A.B. in Journalism. Was assistant women's editor and managing editor of The Daily Californian, then known as the Monarch of the College Dailies.

Prepared President Sproul's biennial report to the legislature, 1942-44; wrote advertising copy; edited house journals; served on local and state boards of the League of Women Voters, primarily in the fields of local and regional government and publications.

Returned to U.C. for a Master of Journalism degree in 1965.

Wrote for the University's Centennial Record. Now doing research, writing, and editing for the Institute of Governmental Studies, U.C., Berkeley.





# Mary B. Davidson Dies at 84

Nov. 1966

Mary Blossom Davidson, former dean of women at the University of California, Berkeley, died Sunday night at a Berkeley rest home at the age of 84, after a long illness.

She retired in 1951 after ten years as dean and 40 years, in all, in the dean's office. She was first named an assistant dean of women in 1911.

Mrs. Davidson, a UC graduate, class of '06, was a founder, in 1923, of the Women's Faculty Club on the campus. Davidson Hall, a women's residence hall, was named in her honor, as a tribute to her long concern for adequate student housing.

In 1952, she was cited by both the California Association of Women Deans and Principals and the National Association of Women Deans and Counsellors.

She was a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma, Prytanean, Mortar Board, Senior Women's Honor Society, Torch and Shield, Town and Gown, and the Town and Country Club of San Francisco.

She was a member of a pioneer family of Tehama

county, where her father, Robert Blossom, owned 35,000 acres of land near Red Bluff.

Surviving is a son, Dr. Charles Davidson of the Harvard Medical School.

Memorial services are scheduled for Thursday at 3 p.m. at St. John's Presbyterian Church, College avenue and Derby street, Berkeley.

Funeral services are being arranged by McNary's Chapel, 3030 Telegraph avenue, Berkeley.

The family has requested that contributions be sent in Mrs. Davidson's name to the University of California in care of the Board of Regents.

























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